

AM Luke 1:26-56 Mary's Song - a Song of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 1 verses 26 to 56. Last week I began a series of three sermons on Luke 1, on events leading up to the birth of Christ.

And we looked last week at verses 1 to 25 where the angel Gabriel promised that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son, John, who would be the herald of the Messiah.

This morning verses 26 to 36 where the same angel tells Mary that she will have a son who will be the Messiah. Luke 1 verse 26.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you.

[1 : 25] But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin?

And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.

[2 : 39] And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah.

And she entered the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[3 : 43] And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

[5 : 12] He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. Let's come before God again.

Virgin birth. Thank you, Juliana, for finding that. Let's turn then to Luke chapter 1. And we will be looking briefly at the whole passage, but especially the so-called Song of Mary.

Beginning at verse 46, Luke 1 is really a tale of two babies.

John the Baptist and Jesus. Both were miracle babies. John's mother, Elizabeth, was too old to have babies, but she did.

[6 : 56] Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin. It should have been impossible, but with God, all things are possible. Both of them were destined to be great.

The angel had said that of John in verse 15. He says it again now of Jesus in verse 32. But the one was infinitely greater than the other.

John was merely the herald of the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah. John was a great man, but only a man.

Jesus was more than a man. He was the Son of God. John later spoke of Jesus as one mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am unworthy to untie.

He was six months older than Jesus, but in this case the older must serve the younger. And he did so willingly. It's also a tale of two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary.

[8 : 26] And again, there is a contrast between them. Elizabeth is relatively unknown. We know of her, of course, in the church, because we're familiar with the Bible.

But the question, who was the mother of John the Baptist, would probably stump a lot of people outside.

It's the kind of question that might get asked on University Challenge, and they might not know the answer. But if you ask, who was the mother of Jesus, every child knows.

Now, as most of you will know, the Roman Catholic Church has exaggerated the importance of Mary out of all proportion.

They regard her as the Queen of Heaven, and as someone who can intercede for us with Jesus, as if it weren't enough just to come to Jesus directly.

[9 : 41] They have statues of her. They pray to her. And although Catholic theologians would deny it, effectively, they worship her.

And the Reformers rightly saw that as a form of idolatry. But we mustn't go to the opposite extreme of ignoring her.

She had a unique role in the history of redemption, and she carried it out with quiet faith. And it's right to honour her, as Elizabeth did, as the mother of our Lord.

Well, we're going to look today, particularly at Mary's song, sometimes called the Magnificat, from the first word in Latin.

I call it a song, although it doesn't actually say that she sang it. It says in verse 46 that Mary said these words.

[10 : 56] But the form is poetic, and that's why we call it a song. After all, think of the Song of Solomon. There's no evidence that that was ever set to music, but it is still quite genuinely a song.

And likewise here, whether Mary sang it or not, it is poetically a song. This is Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting with that threefold blessing in verses 42 to 45.

Blessed are you among women. Blessed is the fruit of your womb. Blessed is she who believed what was spoken of by the Lord. Mary doesn't take any of the praise herself for that.

Instead, her response is to praise God. And in particular, she speaks of God as her saviour.

And I've called it, therefore, in the title to this sermon, a song of salvation. I want us to look at this song this morning under three headings.

[12 : 18] The great things that God had done for Mary. The great things that he has done throughout history. And the great things that he has done for Israel and for us by keeping his covenant.

First, though, let's just briefly glance through the story. Six months have passed since the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple in Jerusalem.

Now he is sent to a city of Galilee called Nazareth with a still more extraordinary message for Mary. Now, Nazareth was just a small provincial town. And Mary was a very insignificant young lady, probably no more than a teenager.

God loves to use small insignificant things to prove that the power is his and not ours.

[13 : 31] Now, Mary, it's true, was of the royal line. And she was betrothed to a man called Joseph of the house of David.

That in itself was not unusual. There were many descendants of David at that time. Someone has calculated that there are a hundred thousand descendants of Edward III in the UK today.

Well, it would have been the same with David. But still, it was important because the Messiah had to be a descendant of David.

The ancient prophets had said so and God always keeps his word. She was, however, only betrothed to Joseph.

They were not yet married. And that, too, is important because the ancient prophets also said that the Messiah must be born of a virgin.

[14:46] Isaiah 7.14 The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel God with us. And God always keeps his word.

The angel greets Mary. Greetings, O favoured one. The Lord is with you. And Mary is troubled. But the angel reassures her. Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And then comes the promise. Behold. Behold. That word behold usually announces something special.

Behold. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and shall call his name Jesus. Which means God saves.

He will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

[15:58] This is what we call the annunciation. And Mary would have had no doubt what it meant that she was to be the mother of the Messiah.

She would have known the prophecy in Isaiah 9. For to us a child is born to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting father prince of peace at the increase of his government and peace there will be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forever more.

The angel had virtually quoted that prophecy. That prophecy and all the prophecies were about to be fulfilled through her.

But how will this be she asks since I'm still a virgin. Now that's not unbelief.

You remember when Zechariah said how shall I know this the angel was angry with him because that did show unbelief. But this is not unbelief this is just bewilderment she wants to understand she wants to know how is God going to do this.

[17:36] She doesn't doubt that he will but how? And the angel explains the Holy Spirit will come upon you. Whenever God does something extraordinary it is through the Spirit.

And if ever you're wondering how can God do this or that the answer will usually be the Holy Spirit will come upon you. Just as the Spirit had hovered over the face of the waters in Genesis 1 when the world was made so the Spirit would come upon Mary and a child would be born in her womb. Therefore that child will be holy. He won't simply be a child born out of wedlock and in those days such a child would be regarded as unholy.

This child is the Son of God. The angel now tells her about Elizabeth. God has worked a miracle in her and he can do so in Mary also.

For with God all things are possible. What a wonderful verse that is. That's something to hold on to isn't it? So many things we would like to see in the world, in the church, in our own lives but we think to ourselves no, that's impossible.

[19:15] no, it isn't impossible. All things are possible with God. Even a virgin birth.

And Mary now replies, behold I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word. What a lovely attitude for us to have quietly and humbly accepting God's will, whatever that may be for us.

Mary now visits Elizabeth in Judea and an extraordinary thing happens. The baby leaps in the womb at Mary's greeting.

She says in verse 44, it leaped for joy. We're told in verse 15 that John would be filled with the spirit from his mother's womb and here it seems that he recognised Jesus.

even in the womb. Proof if we needed it that the baby in the womb is a real human being. And Elizabeth now blesses Mary.

[20 : 29] Blessed are you among women. Blessed is the fruit of your womb. She counts it an honour to be visited by the mother of her Lord. And she blesses her for believing.

What a wonderful encouragement for Mary. And again, what an example to us. The older mother encouraging the younger.

That's how it's meant to be in the church, isn't it? The older encouraging the younger. Now Mary responds with this song of praise.

So let's look now at what it says. Firstly, the great things that God has done for Mary.

In verses 46 to 49, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

[21 : 39] For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name.

If you know your Bible well, then those opening words will remind you of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel chapter 2. Hannah says, My heart exults in the Lord.

I rejoice in your salvation. One can imagine Mary searching the scriptures for other women who had been promised babies and reading Hannah's song and thinking yes, that's me.

Like Hannah, she praises God. My soul magnifies the Lord. To magnify something is to make it bigger.

Same word is used in Psalm 34. Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 69. I will praise the name of God with a song.

[22 : 55] I will magnify him with thanksgiving. Preachers sometimes use the illustration of a magnifying glass making things bigger.

I always feel slightly uneasy at that because that suggests that God is small which he certainly isn't. Perhaps a better illustration might be a telescope.

If I look at Jupiter in the night sky then it's just a tiny speck of light. But if I look at it through a telescope I begin to see that it's not so small.

It's actually huge. It's bigger than the earth. Admittedly that has a problem too because God is not distant is he like Jupiter.

But the aim of praise is to show the greatness of God. To show how big he is. Mary wants us to see the greatness of the Lord.

[24 : 03] At the end of this service we'll be singing that hymn tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord. And you may notice as we sing that it's based on this passage that Timothy Dudley Smith saw this as the central theme of this song.

The greatness of the Lord. Mary wants to magnify her God. She praises him especially though for salvation.

My spirit rejoices in God my saviour. Roman Catholics say that Mary was born sinless. But that wasn't how he saw it.

How she saw it. She needed a saviour like everyone else. And that saviour was actually inside her womb.

How extraordinary was that? The name Jesus means God saves.

[25 : 12] God is so there is actually a play of words here in the original language. My spirit rejoices in God my saviour. It's all one as if she had said my spirit rejoices in Jesus.

Already she knows that this baby within her is the one who will save the world. God is her saviour personally notice.

God my saviour. She wasn't just rejoicing in an abstract way that God saves people but that God had saved her.

We too if we're Christians can say God is my saviour. Indeed it's the mark of a Christian that we can speak in personal terms about the Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd my rock my redeemer. I hope you can all say that.

[26 : 19] But Mary has of course a special personal reason for praising the Lord. God has chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah and she is overwhelmed at that thought.

A poor girl like me the mother of the Messiah. She's amazed at God's mercy.

He has looked on the humble estate of his servant and she is amazed at the honour who behold from now on all generations will call me blessed just as Elizabeth had said.

And she concludes truly he who is mighty has done great things for me. And she bows before him holy is his name.

It's rather like the seraphim in Isaiah isn't it where they bow down and say holy holy holy is the Lord. Notice that she doesn't claim to be holy.

[27 : 30] It's not because of her holiness that these things are happening but because God who is holy has chosen her. Now Mary's testimony here is obviously unique but every Christian can say with Mary God has done great things for me.

He saved us from our sin. He's given us his spirit. He's promised us heaven. These are great things and we should be praising him for them.

Secondly Mary praises God for the great things that he's done throughout history. Verses 50 to 53 and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has showed strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.

God's mercy you see is not just for Mary but for all who fear him in all generations past and generations future.

[28 : 54] The generations we read about in the Bible and our own generation today. What he's doing for Mary is entirely in character.

This is the way God works. He brings down the mighty and he lifts up the humble. God had looked on Mary in her humble estate in verse 48.

Likewise he exalts those of humble estate in verse 52. Now this is one of the most radical passages in scripture.

The proud, the mighty, the rich, all the people whom the world would praise, all brought down. And the poor and the hungry, the people whom the world would despise, raised up, God sounds almost like the communist manifesto, doesn't it?

But this is simply a record of what God has done through history. As Paul says, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

[30 : 12] And he did so, so that no one might boast. Once again, there are echoes of Hannah's song. In 1 Samuel 2 verse 4, the bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. Hannah herself was an example of this.

Once she was barren and despised, now she was the happy mother of Samuel. But there are many other examples. Proud Pharaoh, for example, brought low, and the Israelites, slaves, set free.

Mighty Babylon, conquered by the Persians, but the Jewish exiles, able to go home and rebuild the temple.

the shepherd boy David, raised up to become king, while the rich and powerful Saul is brought to nothing.

[31 : 29] There's the same radical edge in some of Jesus' sayings. In Luke 4, for example, in the synagogue at Nazareth, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Yes, we must interpret these words spiritually, but still they show God as the champion of the weak and the poor.

as James says, has not God chosen those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith? God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

He can make the poor spiritually rich and the weak spiritually strong. And again, as Christians, we can add our testimony to that.

Many of us can say in the words of Psalm 113, we have been raised from the dust and made to sit with princes. Finally, Mary speaks of the great things God has done for Israel.

[32 : 55] Verses 54 to 55. God has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

In other words, God has kept his covenant promise. Mary knew her Bible. No doubt like Timothy from a child, she'd known the Holy Scriptures.

She knew the promises of God. She knew of God's covenant with Abraham. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you. Make your name great and you shall be a blessing.

She knew the old covenant of the law. She knew the new covenant to write that law on our hearts and forgive our sins. And she knew God's covenant with David to give to him an everlasting

kingdom.

All of that was about to be fulfilled in this child of hers. that's really what it was all about. God is keeping his covenant promise.

[34 : 08] And it wasn't just for the nation of Israel. God had said to Abraham and you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Extending salvation to the Gentiles.

This is all of God's mercy notice. His mercy is for those who fear him. In verse 50, he has helped Israel in remembrance of his mercy. Verse 54, none of this is deserved, but it is promised.

And Mary is confident God will keep his word. That baby in her womb is the proof of that. As Christians, we too can take comfort in the covenant promises of God.

Whatever God has promised, he will do. God said he would send his son to save us from our sins and he has.

God promised to send his spirit and he has. God said he would give us a new heart and a new spirit and he has.

[35 : 30] God said he would build his church and he has. He's promised us heaven and he will not go back on his word.

So this then is Mary's song. After that she remained three months with Elizabeth and then she went home. we will all be going home shortly.

But before we do, let me just ask you, is there a song in your heart as there was in Mary's heart?

You know the Bible is full of song. The Israelites sang when God brought them through the Red Sea. David gave us the whole book of Psalms.

Jesus sang after the last supper. Paul and Silas sang in prison. Paul teaches us to sing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[36 : 40] There are songs in heaven in the book of Revelation. If you're a Christian here this morning, your heart should be full of song.

It should be full of praise. It may or may not express itself in melody, but deep within your heart, certainly, you should be full of praise for God your Saviour.

You should be able to say with the psalmist, he has put a new song on my lips. And again, the Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Especially, you should be singing a song of salvation, praising God that he has saved you, and at such a cost, the Son of God himself dying for you on the cross.

Of course, if you're not yet a Christian, then you won't yet have that song of salvation in your heart, but that can change. One of those great promises which God always keeps is that God will save everyone who trusts in Christ.

[38 : 06] Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. that includes you. May all of us be able to echo Mary's song.

May we all magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our Saviour. Amen. Amen. God! God gate bare, God he can you